

Don Miguel de O'Reilly House
32 Avilés Street, opposite Bravo Lane
St. Augustine
St. Johns County
Florida

HABS No. FLA-123

HABS

FLA.

55- SAUG

16-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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DON MIGUEL DE O'REILLY HOUSE

Street Address: 32 Avilés Street, opposite Bravo Lane, St. Augustine,
St. Johns County, Florida

Present Owner: St. Joseph's Convent (Sisters of St. Joseph),
St. George Street, St. Augustine, Florida

Present Use: Used for storage

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

While the historical site of the O'Reilly house can be successfully located from 1788 to the present time, it is very difficult to locate it accurately before 1788. Since most of the property transfers fail to describe the properties that changed ownership, and since the Spanish, British, and American occupants of St. Augustine employed different measuring systems in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, properties and land sites cannot usually be clearly delineated. The co-operative efforts of the archaeological, architectural, and historical disciplines should eventually accurately locate these historic land plots.

The Juan Elixio de la Puente Map of 1764 reveals that a house was located on what is believed to be the present site of the O'Reilly house. That building, situated on lot 265, Square C (according to the descriptions of the Puente map) was described as being a ripio house of Joseph de la Rosa; since it is quite difficult to use the Puente map for modern measurement, it is possible to suggest that the house of stone of Lorenzo Jose de Leon, located on lot 266, north of de la Rosa's house, may have been the dwelling that stood where the present O'Reilly house rests. Nevertheless, the Mariano de la Rocque Map of 1788 refers to Don Miguel de O'Reilly's dwelling as a two-story masonry house in mediocre condition. The John de Solis and James Moncrief maps of 1765 had shown a house on the approximate site, but the house varied in size and position on each map; only the Moncrief listed a possible owner - Mr. Wateon. Don Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada's Property Assessment of 1790 and the appraisal of 1800 describe the O'Reilly house as a rubble-work masonry house following de la Rocque's description.

Following Father O'Reilly's will, in the early nineteenth century the house passed into the trust of his brother, Juan, with the instruction that the building be used to house nuns, for education, according to the plan of St. Francis de Sales with its Institution of the Visitation.

Juan O'Reilly and, then, David A. King in 1827 held the building in trust until Miguel O'Reilly's instructions could be arranged in

1870. At that time Bishop Verot became the first bishop of the area and received the house in the name of the Catholic Church. Before the arrival of Bishop Verot the Catholic Church interests in Georgia and Florida were vested in the office of a Vicariate. The Vicariate, or the Vicar Apostolic, as he was entitled in Georgia and Florida, did not have the power to receive property in the name of the church. Thus, it was only when a Bishop's office was opened in the Florida area that the O'Reilly will could be fulfilled. (This information concerning the Catholic Church's historic operations was obtained through the kind assistance of Sister Mary Albert of the Sisters of St. Joseph.) In 1876 the building was transferred to the Convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph, a corporation of St. Johns County, and the stipulations of Miguel O'Reilly's will were thus finally realized. According to the Tax Rolls of St. Johns County the property is designated as lot 1, block 35, of the City of St. Augustine.

Since the Sisters of St. Joseph have acquired the O'Reilly House it has been renovated and modernized internally. Except for the fireplaces and paneled ceilings, architectural investigations show that the house has been generally reconstructed. However, a reconstruction was accomplished which carefully copied the form and craftsmanship of the historic structure.

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: This chronological listing of owners concerns the owners who lived on the probable site of the present O'Reilly house. According to the conclusions of this research, it is doubtful that all these owners lived in the house that currently exists. Also, it is essential to mention that this list is not necessarily complete.

1764 and for an unknown time prior to 1764....Joseph de la Rosa
(Juan Elixio de la Puente Map and Index of St. Augustine, Florida, in 1764)

1764-85 Mr. Watson
(James Moncrief Map of 1765)

1785 and for an unknown time prior to 1785....John Mowbrary
(Escrituras July 16, 1784, February 26, 1787, p. 191)

1785-1800 Don Miguel de O'Reilly
(Escrituras, July 16, 1785, February 26, 1787, p. 191)
(Mariano de la Rocque Map and Index of St. Augustine, Florida, in 1788)
(Don Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada Land Inventory and Assessment of 1791)
(Assessor's Inventory (Appraisal) of 1800)

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1823 Don Juan O'Reilly (Juan O'Reilly held the property in trust according to Miguel O'Reilly's will.)
(St. Johns County Deed Book H, page 156, June 27, 1827)

1827 David A. King (trustee)
(St. Johns County Deed Book H, page 156, June 27, 1827)

1870-1876 Bishop Verot in the name of the Catholic Church
(Roman Catholic Church Records)

1876 Convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph, A Corporation of
St. Johns County
(Roman Catholic Church Records)

1899 St. Josephs Convent (The Sisters of St. Joseph changed their legal title to "St. Joseph's Convent")
(St. Johns County Deed Book 3, page 250, Nov. 28, 1897)

2. Date of erection: The exact date of erection is unknown. The house before reconstruction, however, was probably erected in the late eighteenth century c. 1760-85.
3. Architect and builder: The architect and/or builder of the house remains unknown.
4. Original plans: The original plans of the house are not available.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: According to the architectural study of August 1960, it was determined that the present house is a reconstructed building. The reconstruction, however, sought to duplicate the original techniques and craftsmanship. Plans have been made by the Sisters of Saint Joseph to restore the building in late 1965, so that it can be opened to the public as part of the 1965 Quadricentennial celebrations. Prior to this it is being used as storage space.
6. Old views: There are some late nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs of this building in the files of the St. Augustine Historical Society and the St. Augustine Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission.
7. Source of information: Most of this research was drawn from the Land and Deed Records of the St. Johns County Archives, the maps, Spanish Records, and Carnegie file house documents of the St. Augustine Historical Society and the St. Augustine Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission. The property records of St. Joseph's Convent were particularly useful in the study of property transfers in the nineteenth century.

Although the plan and construction of the O'Reilly House are not dealt with in detail in Albert Manucy's book, The Houses of St. Augustine, 1565-1821 (St. Augustine, Florida: St. Augustine Historical Society, 1962), this book should be consulted for an understanding of the development of domestic architecture in the town and in Spanish America.

8. Likely sources not yet investigated: The University of Florida's P. K. Yonge Library's Stetson Collection, Lockey Collection, and British Colonial Records could offer more material relevant to the history of this house and other St. Augustine historic houses. The East Florida Papers collection in the Library of Congress (Washington, D. C.) and the Bahama Islands Colonial Records might likewise offer information pertaining to St. Augustine historic houses and sites.

Prepared by St. Augustine Historical
Restoration and Preservation Commission
August 1962 AND

John C. Poppeliers, Architectural
Historian, National Park Service
March 1965

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest and merit: Although the O'Reilly House can, in general, be considered a reconstruction, it is fairly typical in most of its features of the modest, two-story, coquina, domestic structures that were built in St. Augustine in the latter eighteenth century. The side-hall plan appears to be its most unique feature.
2. Condition of fabric: The house is in excellent condition and is kept in good repair by the maintenance force of the convent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Number of stories: Two.
2. Type wall construction: Plastered coquina masonry exterior and bearing walls; wooden frame interior partition.
3. Layout: Rectangular.

4. Over-all dimensions: 29'-9" (three-bay front) x 40'-2 3/4".
5. Foundations: Not observed. Exterior walls continue below grade. The following paragraph from Albert Manucy's The Houses of St. Augustine, 1565-1821 (St. Augustine, Florida: St. Augustine Historical Society, 1962), page 68, discusses the method in which the foundations of St. Augustine houses were constructed. The foundations of the O'Reilly House probably were handled in a similar manner:

By present-day standard, house walls had no foundations. The usual preparation was to excavate a trench slightly wider than the wall and about a foot deep. A thin layer of flat stones or oyster shells was tossed in as a sort of spread footing, after which the workmen began wall construction without further ado.
6. Wall construction: Coquina masonry with plaster outside and plaster inside.
7. Porches: There is a single cantilevered, roofed balcony running the length of the east facade at the second-story level.
8. Chimney: There is a single exterior chimney of coquina masonry on the west wall. This chimney admits fireplaces into its east (interior) face on both the ground and second-story levels. These fireplaces and mantels are made of decoratively carved coquina. This sort of fireplace treatment or coquina carving is not in keeping with the character of the architecture and probably should be considered as a liberty taken by the mason at the time of the "reconstruction."
9. Openings: The door and window openings are framed in wood and set into the coquina jamba. The lintels are of wood. In general, the wooden doors are six-paneled. At least one door has two glazed panels. The windows of the first floor have both six-over-six and twelve-over-twelve double-hung wooden sash; those of the second floor have six-over-six double-hung wooden sash. The attic window has twelve-over-eight double-hung wooden sash. The wooden exterior shutters are two-paneled and louvered.
10. Roof: The roof is a gable with the ridge running east and west, perpendicular to the street front. The roofs of both the house and the balcony are covered with asbestos cement shingles. Eaves extend about one foot and are terminated by a square-edged wooden fascia.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The ground floor consists of three rooms and a side stair hall. Entrance is made from the street directly into the stair hall. The eastern (front) portion of the house consists of a large room on the northeast and the stair hall on the southeast. The western (rear) portion of the house consists of a small room on the southwest and one other room on the northwest. There is a fireplace on the west wall of the latter.

The second floor also consists of three rooms and a side stair hall. There is a single large room across the east (front) end of the house. The west (rear) end of the house consists of a small room on the southwest and a larger room on the northwest. A portion of the east end of the stair hall is partitioned off and contains another stairway which leads up to the attic. The second-story fireplace is on the west wall of the northwest room.

2. Stairways: There are two stairways. The main stairway leads from the entrance hall, in a single run, to the second-floor stair hall. The other stairway leads from the second-floor stair hall, with winders, to the attic. Both stairs have wooden treads and risers.
3. Flooring: The flooring on the ground floor is 4-1/4" x 4-1/4" ceramic tile, red and black alternating in a checkerboard pattern. The flooring on the second floor is pine boards laid in a running pattern.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The ceiling finish is tongue-and-groove wooden paneling throughout. All of the walls are finished with plaster.
5. Doorways and doors: Interior doors and openings are similar to exterior.
6. Trim: Trim is conservative in design and is made from standard molded pieces.
7. Hardware: The hardware is recent and is not remarkable in design or character.
8. Lighting: The modern electric lighting fixtures are not unusual in design or character. Conventional ceiling outlets and switches are used.
9. Heating: There is no heat source other than the two fireplaces described under "chimneys" (item 8, page 5).

D. Site:

1. Orientation and general setting: The north wall faces 4° west of north. The house is situated on the grounds of the convent of the Order of the Sisters of St. Joseph, in one of the historic areas of the city. The surrounding neighborhood is made up of private residences, some small tourist shops and several other historic structures. The convent occupies one square block in this neighborhood and consists of a school, dining hall, kitchen, living quarters, and various outbuildings. The main portion of the convent faces to the west - the eastern portion of the convent property therefore becomes its rear yard and Avilés Street can be called the back road to the convent. The O'Reilly House is situated on this back street and thus is in the rear yard of the convent.
2. Enclosures: The east facade of the house forms a continuous part of the wall of the convent. The remainder of the house is on the inside of the convent wall. The street wall to the north of the structure is constructed of coquina masonry, 8'-10" high; it has a large driveway opening, for service to the convent, and has wooden gates. The street wall to the south is also of coquina masonry, 11'-6" high; it decreases in height to 7'-0" and continues to the Gaspar Papy House (HABS No. FLA-164) at 36 Avilés Street, which is also now part of the convent complex.
3. Outbuildings: There are no outbuildings pertinent to the house itself; however, it is surrounded to the north, west, and south by various convent buildings.
4. Walks, driveways: To the north and west there are concrete driveways which give access to the convent utility buildings. The O'Reilly House itself is almost at the street line (flush with the sidewalk).
5. Landscaping: The walled yard to the south is now largely grass. A lush wisteria vine grows from this yard onto the coquina street wall.

Prepared by William A. Stewart, Architect
St. Augustine Historical Restoration and
Preservation Commission - August 1960

AND

John C. Poppeliers, Architectural Historian
National Park Service - March 1965